A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

by

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The study of Greek mythology has a long history, of about 2500 years. The first mythological 'handbooks' were already written around 500 BC,[1] and interest has rarely ever disappeared. Yet each time has its own interests and approaches, depending on the social and cultural circumstances of the day. In my contribution I would like to briefly present that history. Naturally, it is impossible to treat every period in detail, and I will strictly concentrate on the history of Greek myth rather than the study of mythology in general. This history has of course been described before, and I have gratefully profited from earlier histories.[2] Yet there is room for a new version, as our knowledge of the study and collecting of mythology in antiquity itself, usually called 'mythography', has recently been the subject of a fresh approach by Alan Cameron.[3] Moreover, as the scholars who dominated the study of mythology in the second half of the twentieth century are gradually passing away, it becomes easier to look back at what has been a fascinating era in the study of Greek mythology.

Antiquity

In the Golden Age of Roman poetry, Roman poets often took material from their learned Greek sources, such as Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes. Parthenius of Nicaea, a Greek poet who had been brought to Rome in the earlier first century BC, even dedicated a small book with mythological love stories, *Sufferings in Love*, to Cornelius Gallus (ca. 70-26 BC), clearly anticipating that Gallus would use them 'for hexameters and elegiacs'.[4] In fact, there must have been many Hellenistic and Imperial mythographical handbooks, but they have

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[1] For the surviving fragments of the early mythographers see R.L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography* I (Oxford, 2000).

[2] See more recently W. Burkert, 'Griechische Mythologie und die Geistesgeschichte der Moderne', in *Entretiens Hardt* 26 (Geneva, 1980) 159-207; F. Graf, *Greek Mythology* (Baltimore and London, 1993) 9-56; C. Jamme, *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe, vol. 2: époque moderne et contemporaine* (Paris, 1995); F. Graf, 'Mythos. II', in *Der Neue Pauly* XV/1 (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2001) 643-48.

[3] A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (New York, 2004); unfortunately, this important study contains neither an *index locorum* nor a bibliography, which does not make it easy to consult. Also still important: A. Henrichs, 'Three Approaches to Greek Mythography', in J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London and New York, 1987, 1988[2]) 242-77.

[4] Parthenius, *Preface*, cf. the excellent edition and commentary by J. Lightfoot, *Parthenius of Nicaea* (Oxford, 1999) with her study of 'Mythography' (224-40). Note now also the lightly corrected text and translation in J.L. Lightfoot, *Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge Mass. & London, 2009) 467-647.

virtually all been lost to us.[5] Even when we have surviving specimens from Hellenistic times, such as the rationalising, probably late fourth-century, Palaephatus' *On Unbelieveble Tales*, which was an important source for Servius (below), and Eratosthenes' *Catasterisms*, our surviving texts are only strongly abridged versions of the originals.[6]

The same is true for the much longer *Genealogiae* of the mythographer Hyginus (who wrote under Augustus), of which we also have only an abridged version, which modern editors commonly call *Fabulae*. It gives not only all kinds of potted mythological plots but also provides lists of all kinds of mythological subjects, such as 'Those who have become immortal from mortals' (224), 'Those who founded the first temples of the gods' (225) or 'Mothers who killed their sons' (239).[7] Such lists came in handy for a culture, the so-called Second Sophistic, which greatly appreciated mythological allusions in the novel, oratory, pantomimes and the visual arts. A man or woman of culture was supposed to know Greek mythology just as in our times older generations were supposed to know the stories of the Bible. As it was part of the display of conspicuous education (*paideia*) to cite mythological details and their sources, we still have many references to obscure mythographers, even though many of these references may well be totally invented.[8] That is why we not only have such lists in Hyginus, but also on many papyri.[9] In fact, it is clear that even schoolchildren had to learn such lists, as school exercises on papyri demonstrate.[10] For example, a fairly recently published papyrus begins with the sons of the Seven against Thebes, continues with minor female goddesses, such as the Fates, Horai, Graces, Sirens, Gorgons, Titanesses, Eumenides, Harpies, Hesperides and, if that is not enough, concludes with the Sentences (pithy sayings) of the Seven Wise Men.[11]

Another surviving Augustan collection with Hellenistic material, if again in slightly abridged form, is that of Conon, whose collection of fifty narratives focuses on foundations of

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[5] For a very full list see Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 27-32.

[6] Palaephatus: see now J. Stern, *Palaefatus* Peri apistôn*: On Unbelievable Tales* (Wauconda, 1996); Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 204-6. Eratosthenes: see now the new editions with commentary by J. Pàmias i Massana, *Eratòstenes de Cirene, Catasterismes* (Barcelona, 2004); J. Pàmias and K. Geus, *Eratosthenes, Sternsagen (Catasterismi)* (Oberhaid, 2007).

[7] Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 33-51. For the most recent text and translation see P.K. Marshall, *Hyginus, Fabulae* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1993) and R. Smith and S. Trzaskoma, *Apollodorus*' Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2007) 95-182.

[8] See the worrying analysis of Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 89-163.

[9] See the excellent discussion by Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 217-52.

[10] W. Clarysse and A. Wouters, 'A schoolboy's exercise in the Chester Beatty Library', *Ancient Society* 1 (1970) 201-35.

[11] M. van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers'Digests?* (Leiden, 1997) 320-1 (= *P.Oxy*. 61.4099). Van Rossum usefully re-edits many mythological papyri but is not always fully used by Cameron, *Greek Mythography*.

cities and cult *aitia*, but also pays attention to homo- and heterosexual love stories.[12] The second- or third-century Antoninus Liberalis collected a series of fourty-one *Transformations* taken from many Hellenistic authors who are often indicated by name, which displays a great interest in metamorphoses and local cult *aitia*.[13] Finally, in the later first century AD, some of the Hellenistic material was also collected in a kind of mythological guide to Homer, the so-called Mythographus Homericus, a lost handbook that contained at least 250 mythological stories, much of which survives only in bits and pieces in the scholia to Homer.[14]

Fortunately, we also have a somewhat more narrative source: the handbook of Apollodorus that dates from the later second century AD. Apollodorus gives us many Greek myths, and in his genealogical sections he follows the Hesiodic *Catalogue* extensively, although adapted to the contemporary *Orphic Rhapsodies* in a number of details. Yet he was certainly not a first-hand reader of many of the works he cites. It has become increasingly clear that Apollodorus too is already dependent on other, Hellenistic mythographical handbooks.[15] His main source may well be the erudite scholar Apollodorus of Athens (c. 180-120 BC). whose rationalising work *On Gods* was clearly an important quarry for later authors on mythology. This Apollodorus was a real scholar whose main interest was the interpretation of the names and epithets of the gods, but who to that end also distinguished different versions and sources of myths.

It was, then, the need to possess cultural capital at the beginning of our era that has saved many details from ancient mythological sources for us.[16] Other sources were the handbooks written as companions for the leading Roman poets Ovid and Virgil. These became increasingly important by the fourth century when mythological poetry experienced a kind of revival. Especially Servius, the learned commentator on Virgil, has preserved an

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[12] See now M.K. Brown, *The* Narratives *of Konon* (Munich, 2002), to be read with the review of J. Lightfoot, *Gnomon* 77 (2005) 299-304.

[13] The standard edition is M. Papathomopoulos, *Antoninus Liberalis*, Les Métamorphoses (Paris, 1968).

[14] For the most recent bibliography see Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 28 note 116; add F.Montanari, 'Ancora sul Mythographus Homericus (e l'*Odissea*)', in A. Hurst and F. Letoublon (eds), *La mythologie et l'Odyssée* (Geneva, 2002) 129-44.

[15] M. Huys, "125 Years of Scholarship on Apollodorus the Mythographer: A Bibliographical Survey," *L'Antiquité Classique* 66 (1997) 319-51, to be added to Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 93-106; M. Huys and D. Colomo, "Bibliographical Survey on Apollodorus the Mythographer. A Supplement," *L'Antiquité Classique* 73 (2004) 219-37. A good modern translation: Smith and Trzaskoma, *Apollodorus*' Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae, 1-93.

[16] The display of cultural capital is also visible in the many surviving mythological wall paintings from Pompeii, see most recently M. Beard, *Pompeii* (London, 2008) 141-52; K. Lorenz, *Bilder machen Räume. Mythenbilder in pompeianischen Häusern* (Berlin, 2008); S. Muth, *Erleben von Raum--Leben im Raum: Zur Funktion mythologischer Mosaikbilder in der römisch-kaiserzeitlichen Wohnarchitektur* (Heidelberg, 2008).

immense amount of mythological data for us, and it has only very recently become clear that he derived many of these from a, or several, lost handbook(s) that was (were) probably written in the second century, which Alan Cameron calls the Mythographus Vergilianus. Its model was the already mentioned Mythographus Homericus.[17]

The Middle Ages

The growing apart of the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire and the eventual fall of the latter made knowledge of Greek mythology an ever scarcer commodity in the West in the centuries between the fall of Rome to the Germanic peoples and the rise of Charlemagne. In fact, the knowledge of Greek and Greek mythology gradually became reduced to an extremely small minority. The main sources available were the already mentioned Servius, astronomical works (and commentaries on them), such as the Latin translation of Aratus and Hyginus' *De astronomia*, which contained much material to explain the mythological names of the constellations, the scholia on Statius' *Thebaid*, and the learned, probably mid-sixth-century Fulgentius with his etymologizing and allegorizing style.[18] The available evidence, to which we of course have to add Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was the richest Latin text available for anybody interested in Greek myth during the Middle Ages, lost in quality through the earlier Middle Ages through the ongoing loss of manuscripts, but also developed in particular into the allegorizing direction due to Fulgentius' influence. Yet the need for commentaries on the most popular school author, Virgil, but also for glosses on other popular authors kept the interest in mythology alive, especially in French and Anglo-Saxon schools, as students had to know the stories behind all the strange names they met in their texts in order to understand what was going on.[19]

A pleasant surprise took place in 1831 when it was announced that at least three mythographers had been discovered in the Vatican, which subsequently have become known as the First, Second and Third Vatican Mythographer, even though the First is known only from one, the Second from more than ten and the Third from more than fourty manuscripts.

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[17] Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 184-216.

[18] L.G. Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus, 1971); G. Hays, 'The Date and Identity of the Mythographer Fulgentius', *J. Medieval Latin* 13 (2003) 163-252; É. Wolff, *Fulgence, Virgile dévoilé* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2009).

[19] M. Herren: 'The transmission and reception of Graeco-Roman mythology in Anglo-Saxon England, 670-800', 27 (1998) 87-103 and 'The earliest European study of Graeco-Roman mythology (AD 600-900)', *Acta Classica Debrecen* 34-5 (1998-99) 25-49**;** B. Miles, 'Irish Evidence for Shared Sources of Classical Mythology in Anglo-Saxon England and Medieval Ireland', in G.R. Wieland *et al*. (eds), *Insignis sophiae arcator. Essays in Honour of Michael W. Herren on his 65th Birthday* (Turnhout, 2006) 124-48**.**

The First, and most important, Mythographer collected his myths, about 230 in number, from the Latin sources at his disposal, but especially from Servius and, if somewhat less, from the scholia on Statius. He had no longer access to Greek sources and therefore probably did not indicate his sources. Moreover he does not use any systematical criterion in his enumeration. This is immediately clear at the beginning, as the first three entries concern Prometheus, Neptunus and Minerva, and Scylla. His aim was to compose a mythological repertory for the schools – in which he must have succeeded, as his model was taken over by the other two Vatican Mythographers.[20] Unfortunately, his exact date, like those of the others, has not yet been established, but he must have lived between 875 and 1025 AD, and possibly worked in France.[21] Although, his work is rarely consulted any longer, he has been very successful in one aspect. He calls the Greek myths *fabulae*, and this term, instead of our modern 'myth', maintained itself as the most common one in Germany into the eighteenth century and in France well into the nineteenth century.[22]

The Renaissance and the early modern period

Although the Mythographers were successful for a while, their dry style could no longer satisfy the Renaissance, and their latest manuscript predates the age of the printed book. The competition came from Italy,[23] where in 1380 the famous author of the *Decamerone*, Boccaccio (1313-1375), published *On the Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* (*De Genealogia deorum gentilium*) in three books, which became the model for all Renaissance mythographies of Italy. The book was immediately highly popular and, after having been printed in Venice in 1472, reached ten editions in the next sixty years, not to mention the Italian, Spanish and French versions. Like many medieval scholars, Boccaccio thought that great truths were hidden beneath the surface of the classical myths that he promised to unveil. He thus continued the allegorical approach but combined it with the medieval encyclopedic

[20] For the second one see now R. Jakobi, 'Zur Überlieferung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Mythographen', *Revue d'Histoire des Textes* NS 3 (2008) 283-6.

[21] For a modern edition see P. Kulcsár, *Mythographi Vaticani I et II* (Turnhout, 1987); better, N. Zorzetti and J. Berlioz, *Le Premier Mythographe du Vatican* (Paris, 1995). For a modern French translation with commentary see Ph. Dain, *Mythographe du Vatican* I (Paris, 1995), II (Paris, 2001) and III (Besançon, 2005); for an English translation without commentary, R.E. Pepin, *The Vatican Mythographers* (New York, 2008).

[22] France: J. Starobinski, *Le remède dans le mal* (Paris, 1989) 233-62 ('Fable et mythologie au xvii^{e} et xviii^{e} siècles'). Germany: see, for example, F. Schisling, *Die Hauptgötter der Fabel in Kupfern, mit ihrer Geschichte und ursprünglicher Bedeutung* (Vienna, 1793); C.T. Damm, *Götter-Lehre und Fabel-Geschichte der alten griechischen und römischen Welt* (Berlin, 1797^{2}).

[23] B. Guthmüller, *Studien zur antiken Mythologie in der italienischen Renaissance* (Weinheim, 1986); P. Gibellini (ed.), *Il mito nella letteratura italiana* I: *dal Medioevo al Rinascimento* (Brescia, 2005).

tradition. However, he followed a genealogical model of exposition, did not know Greek (although he did quote Arabic astrologers), did not distinguish between different versions and did not manage to package his erudition in such a way that it was easy for poets or artists to consult. In fact, as is true of many classical handbooks – contemporary with him and indeed earlier ones - his knowledge is often indirect and frequently based on his predecessors.[24]

This all changed with the appearance of Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* in Venice in 1567,[25] the most lucid, learned and accessible mythography of the Late Medieval and Renaissance period, which was often reprinted. Natale Conti or Natalis Comes (1520-?1582) was a learned man, who not only knew Greek, but also translated Greek works, such as Athenaeus, and even wrote Greek poetry.[26] It is therefore not surprising that his work contains about 3000 references to Greek and Roman literature, although he did not shrink from cleverly faking a number of them. In his expositions Conti weighed the potential value of each myth to the Renaissance Christian. His work is thus not only a mythological handbook but also a manual of behaviour. It is probably this combined quality that made his work the most popular handbook in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It appeared early enough to be used in England by Spenser, but Milton and Robert Burton consulted him too. His influence would endure until the later seventeenth century, as his work was last reprinted in Hanover in 1669.[27]

Although the study of mythology did not make much progress in the seventeenth century and myth was still approached as part of erudition and etymologies,[28] the world did change. The great European discoveries brought an enormous mass of evidence about foreign peoples with religions the Europeans never had even dreamt of. This made the more perceptive intellectuals realise that the traditional stories from Greece and Rome perhaps were more than just 'stories', *fabulae*, as they were still called in imitation of the First Vatican Mythographer and did deserve serious attention.

The Enlightenment

[24] C. Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, 2 vols, ed. V. Zaccaria (Milano, 1998).
[25] For the date of the *editio princeps* see Ph. Ford, 'The Mythologiae of Natale Conti and the Pléiade', in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bariensis* (Tempe, 1998) 243-50.
[26] This has escaped Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 251.
[27] For useful introductions and bibliographical data see now R.M. Iglesias Montiel and C.A. Morán, *Natale Conti, Mitologia* (Murcia, 1988); J. Mulryan and S. Brown, *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, 2 vols (Tempe, 2006). Also note the reprint of the *editio princeps* (New York, 1976).
[28] C. Faisant and L. Godard de Donville (eds), *La Mythologie au xvii^{e} siècle* (Marseille, 1982).

The turning point in this development is a brief essay, *De l'origine des fables*, published in 1724, but probably written in the 1690s, by the Frenchman Bernard de Fontenelle (1657-1757). It still is a delight to read because of its light, rationalistic tone, which not only suggests a human origin of religion and a skepsis regarding miracles - in this respect Fontenelle is a forerunner of David Hume - but also imagines the birth of myth from simple accidents:

> A young man fell into the river and no one could recover the body. What happened? The philosophy of the time teaches that there are in the river young girls who rule it. The girls have carried off the young man – as is very natural – and one needs no proofs in order to believe it.

From one such story 'primitive man' made many others by analogy, according to Fontenelle. But he did not stop at reflecting on the origin of myth. He also inaugurated the comparative method by noting similarities 'between the fables of the Americans and those of the Greeks', such as both sending 'the souls of those who have lived badly to certain muddy and disagreeable lakes'. Even more astonishing is his comparison of the myth of Orpheus with that of the Inca Manco Capac in that both were a kind of culture bringer. Rather daringly, Fontenelle also concluded from this comparison that the Greeks, like the Americans, had been 'savages'. Finally, he noted that writing helped to disseminate myths but also fixed them in the state they were. This interest in the effects of writing on myth is highly unusual and will not be found again until contemporary analyses. At the end of his essay he strongly rejected the idea that the Greek myths contained 'hidden secrets of the physical and moral world'. On the contrary, they revealed 'the history of the errors of the human mind'. It is clear that Fontenelle was on the side of the moderns in the famous 'Quarrel of the ancients and moderns'. His essay is perhaps one of the most influential attempts at discrediting the ancient allegorical approach of myth. It also shows that the medieval and Renaissance approach had come to an end, without there yet being a new paradigm.[29]

Unlike Fontenelle, who paid little attention to any particular myth, his learned compatriot Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749) added another, perhaps even more important, aspect: mythology as expression of the culture, customs and social order of a specific community. He thus explained the three divine generations of Hesiod's *Theogony* – Ouranos and Gaia, Kronos and Rhea, and Zeus – as the reflection of three theological systems. The myth of the Thracian king Lycurgus'

[29] *B. de Fontenelle. Oeuvres complètes* III, ed. A. Niderst (Paris, 1989) 187-202. I quote from the English translation by B. Feldman and R.D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology (1680-1860)* (Bloomington and London, 1972) 7-18. For a good German translation and an important study by W. Krauss, 'Fontenelle und die Aufklärung', see Fontenelle, *Philosophische Neuigkeiten für Leute von Welt und für Gelehrte*, ed. H. Bergmann (Leipzig, 1989) 228-42, 371-439, respectively; A. von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth* (Bloomington, 2002) 5-7 (brief but interesting); on the date, A. Marcone, *Sul mondo antico* (Florence, 2009) 95-112 ('L'Origine des Fables de Fontenelle', 2008[1]).

resistance against Dionysus and his maenads in *Iliad* VI reflected the resistance of the northern Greeks against the introduction of the god's cult, an interpretation that was long accepted and disproved only by the discovery of Dionysus' name in the Linear-B tablets.[30]

These French views also received attention outside France.[31] Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), professor of Greek and university librarian at Göttingen,[32] almost certainly knew Fontenelle and certainly was acquainted with Fréret. Heyne was deeply interested in Greek myth and often wrote about it; he even edited the mythographer Apollodorus in an edition that long remained authoritative (1782-83). In Heyne's opinion it was important to have handbooks of Greek myth for artists and pupils, but he also considered Greek myth important for the study of mankind, philosophy and religion. Yet in order to avoid the connotation 'false tale' of Greek *mythos* he came up with a new term for these Greek traditions. Instead of the usual German *Fabel* and *Fabellehre* ('mythology'), he introduced the term *mythus* in 1783,[33] and posited that myth explained the admirable and frightening sides of nature. Moreover, like his friend Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803),[34] he departed from the presupposition that myth had a local origin and gave expression to the *Volksgeist*. [35] Unlike Fréret, Heyne was more interested in myth in general than in specific myths. He wrote much about the origin of mythic thought, but in the end he made not much progress with the interpretation of individual myths. In fact, towards the end of his life he wrote a kind of guide for the interpretation of Greek mythology, in which he argued

[30] N. Fréret, 'Réflexions générales sur la nature de la religion des Grecs, et sur l'idée qu'on doit se former de leur mythologie', in *Histoire de l'académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 23 (1756) 17-26, apparently not reprinted in Fréret's collected works. For Fréret see R. Simon, *Nicolas Fréret, académicien* (Geneva, 1961); B. Barret-Kriegel, *Jean Mabillon* (Paris, 1988) 163-209, 277-82 (bibliography); C. Grell and C. Volpilhac-Auger (eds), *Nicolas Fréret, légende et vérité* (Oxford, 1994).

[31] For the study of myth in the eighteenth century see H. Mockerl, *Poesie und Mythos* (Frankfurt, 1981); C. Grell and C. Michel (eds), *Primitivisme et mythes des origines dans la France des Lumières, 1680-1820* (Paris, 1988).

[32] For Heyne see most recently S. Fornaro, *I Greci senza lumi. L'antropologia della Grecia antica in Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812) e nel suo tempo* = Nachr. Ak. Wiss. Göttingen, I. Philol.–Hist. Kl. 2004, Nr. 5; M. Heidenreich, *Christian Gottlob Heyne und die Alte Geschichte* (Munich and Leipzig, 2006). For his bibliography see F.-A. Haase, *Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729 - 1812). Bibliographie zu Leben und Werk. Gedruckte Veröffentlichungen. Zeitgenössische Schriften zu seiner Rezeption. Forschungsliteratur* (Heidelberg, 2002).

[33] C.G. Heyne, *Apollodori bibliothecae libri tres et fragmenta* (Göttingen 1783) xxix: *fabulas seu quo vocabulo lubentius utor, mythos.*

[34] For Herder and myth see V. Verra, *Mito, revelazione e filosofia in J.G. Herder e nel suo tempo* (Milano, 1966); U. Faust, *Mythologien und Religionen des Ostens bei Johann Gottfried Herder* (Münster, 1977).

[35] E.-A. Horstmann, 'Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft. Der Mythosbegriff bei Christian Gottlob Heyne', *Arch. f. Begriffsgesch.* 16 (1972) 60-85; G. Chiarini, 'Ch.G. Heyne e gli inizi dello studio scientifico della mythologia', *Lares* 55 (1989) 317-31 and, especially, F. Graf, 'Die Entstehung des Mythosbegriffs bei Christian Gottlob Heyne', in idem (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft. Das Paradigma Roms* (Stuttgart, 1993) 284-94.

that the mythical language (*sermo mythicus*) should not be analysed according to modern criteria but according to the usage of ancient times. Moreover, myths that seem to defy interpretation can be interpreted by comparing them to those of the 'savages' or by applying what we know about the ancient culture. Finally, as there is no system in Greek mythology we always have to look first for the origin of the myths. In the end, Heyne was clearly rather sceptical about our possibility to bring some order in the 'chaos' of Greek mythology.[36]

Nineteenth-century German scholarship

Heyne was indebted to the Enlightenment, but also to the beginning of the Romantic movement. It was especially the latter that would be highly influential in Germany. It is probably no exaggeration to state that one of its consequences was a 'longing for myth' that would remain a feature of German culture well into the twentieth century.[37] Yet this fascination did not immediately promote a proper understanding of myth. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Heidelberg classicist Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858) published a huge four-volume *The Symbolism and Mythology of Ancient Peoples, Especially the Greeks* that attracted much attention and fierce discussion.[38] Creuzer, like other contemporaries such as Herder and Goethe, had been much impressed by the recent translations of Indian classics, such as the *Bhagavadgītā* (1785) and the *Upanishads* (1801), and thought that these contained a much older body of myth than the Greeks possessed. Consequently, Creuzer tried to interpret Greek mythology using an Indian key but also with the help of the neoplatonist tradition - and fertility symbols which had more recently come to the fore in scholarly discourse.[39] Naturally this did not result in a clear method, quite the contrary, and his symbolic approach, though influential, was soon rejected.[40]

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[36] C.G. Heyne, *Sermonis mythici sive symbolici interpretatio ad causas et rationes ductasque inde regulas revocata*, in *Commentationes Societatis Regiae Scientiarum Gottingensis recentiores*, nov. ser. 16 (1807) 285-323.

[37] G.S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany* (Chicago & London, 2004).

[38] F. Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*[1] (Darmstadt 1810-12; [2] 1819-22; [3] 1836-43). The third edition contained about 3000 pages, and the abridged edition (Darmstadt 1822) still numbered 940 pages.

[39] For Creuzer see S. Fornaro, 'Friedrich Creuzer und die Diskussion über Philologie und Mythologie zu Beginn des 19. Jhs.', in M. Korenjak and K. Töchterle (eds), *Pontes* 1 (Innsbruck 2001) 28-42; S.C. Humphreys, *The Strangeness of Gods* (Oxford 2004) 199-214 (good contextualisation); F. Engehausen et al. (eds), *Friedrich Creuzer 1771-1858. Philologie und Mythologie im Zeitalter der Romantik* (Heidelberg and Weil am Rhein 2008); S. Fornaro, 'Friedrich Creuzers Mythologie', *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 181 (2008) 59-68.

[40] See the documents in E. Howald, *Der Kampf um Creuzers Symbolik. Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten* (Tübingen 1926).

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It is therefore not surprising that in 1825 one of Heyne's successors at Göttingen, Karl Otfried Müller (1797-1840), published a new study with the programmatic title *Prolegomena to a Scientific Mythology*.[44] With Müller we are well in the age of Romanticism, and this is clearly visible in his work.[45] Myth was for him 'Narratives of acts and fates of individuals', which belong to a time preceding the real history of Greece. It is highly interesting that Müller, a close friend of the Grimm brothers and familiar with their work on fairy tales, stresses that myth is a narrative, as this aspect has often been neglected in subsequent research. In fact, Müller himself also did not recognise that myths can travel and incorporate elements from other cultures. But he stressed that myth did not, as many a forerunner and contemporary still thought, contain symbolic, allegorical or philosophical wisdom. This was enormous progress - from which his most important successors could no longer retreat.

Following Herder, Müller stressed that myth was the reflection of the national (= tribal) identity ('Mythos als Stammsage') and of different historical periods. Thus the myths of Demeter belonged to the world of the prehistoric peasants, whereas those of Zeus and the Olympians were typical of the feudal, Homeric way of life. Müller's interest was mainly historical with little

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[41] F. Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (Darmstadt, 1810-12[1], 1819-22[2], 1836-43[3]). The third edition contained about 3000 pages, and the abridged edition (Darmstadt, 1822) still counted 940 pages.

[42] For Creuzer see most recently S. Fornaro, 'Friedrich Creuzer und die Diskussion über Philologie und Mythologie zu Beginn des 19. Jhs.', in M. Korenjak and K. Töchterle (eds), *Pontes I* (Innsbruck, 2001) 28-42; Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, 121-50; S.C. Humphreys, *The Strangeness of Gods* (Oxford, 2004) 199-214 (good contextualisation); F. Engehausen *et al*. (eds), *Friedrich Creuzer 1771-1858. Philologie und Mythologie im Zeitalter der Romantik* (Heidelberg and Weil am Rhein, 2008); S. Fornaro, 'Friedrich Creuzers Mythologie', *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 181 (2008) 59-68.

[43] See the documents in E. Howald, *Der Kampf um Creuzers Symbolik. Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten* (Tübingen, 1926)

[44] C.O. Müller, *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (Göttingen, 1825), reprinted with an introduction by K. Kerényi in Darmstadt in 1970.

[45] On Müller see most recently W. Unte and H. Rohlfing, *Quellen für eine Biographie Karl Otfried Müllers* (Hildesheim, 1997); W.M. Calder III and R. Schlesier (eds), *Zwischen Rationalismus und Romantik. Karl Otfried Müller und die antike Kultur* (Hildesheim, 1998); W.M. Calder III *et al*., *Teaching the English Wissenschaft. The Letters of Sir George Cornewall Lewis to Karl Otfried Müller (1828-1839)* (Hildesheim, 2002).

attention to the intellectual content of myth. For him, myth was primarily an important instrument to penetrate the darkness of Greek tribal prehistory, whereby he focused not only on the myths of specific peoples but also of particular places, thus foreshadowing recent interest in local mythology. Müller even reflected on the relationship between myth and ritual by postulating, certainly partially rightly as we will see momentarily, that myth arose from cult.[46] His interest in the tribal nature of Greek mythology was shared by his contemporaries, and in Germany with its *Kleinstaaterei* Müller's influence would last well until the beginning of the twentieth century.[47]

It was one of the disastrous legacies of Romanticism that scholars now started to see Nature everywhere in Greek myth. This becomes very clear in the leading and often reprinted German handbook of Greek mythology of the second half of the nineteenth century of the Hellenist Ludwig Preller (1810-1861),[48] who divided his *Griechische Mythologie* into two volumes, one on the gods and one on the heroes. We should not forget, though, that German scholars long used the term 'mythology' where modern scholars would use the term 'religion'.[49] In other words, his *Griechische Mythologie* still combined the study of Greek mythology and religion in a manner that later scholars would gradually abandon. While still using Heyne's term *mythus*, Preller had an open mind and, unlike later German scholars, still admitted influence from the Orient and his was in many ways the first modern systematic collection of the mythological evidence. The fascination with Nature is also very much apparent in the books and largest dictionary of Greek mythology ever, Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher's (1845-1923) A*usführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (1884-1937), which is still useful as a collection of material, though not for its interpretations. For example, Roscher interpreted Apollo as a solar god and the protector of colonies because sunny weather was required for the sending of colonists overseas, and the slaying of Python in Delphi symbolized the victory of the sun-god over the power of winter.[50]

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[46] Müller, *Prolegomena*, 108-9, 235, 257.

[47] He was followed by another Müller, viz. Heinrich Dietrich Müller (1823-1893), *Mythologie der griechischen Stämme*, 2 vols (Göttingen 1857-1869). For a critical discussion of the Müllers and others of their ilk see O. Gruppe, *Die griechischen Culte und Mythen in ihren Beziehungen zu den orientalischen Religionen* I [no more appeared] (Leipzig, 1887) 139-51.

[48] L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie* (Berlin, 1854, 1860-61^2, 1872^3). For Preller see G.T. Stichling, *Ludwig Preller. Eine Gedächtnisrede in der Freimaurerloge Amalia zu Weimar gehalten* (Weimar, 1863); A. Baumeister, 'Ludwig Preller', in *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* 26 (Leipzig, 1888) 561-66.

[49] For many examples see A. Henrichs, `Welckers Götterlehre', in W.M. Calder III *et al.* (eds), *Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker: Werk und Wirkung* (Stuttgart, 1986) 179-229 at 187-90

[50] For Roscher see now M. Konaris, 'The Greek gods in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

Nature still played a substantial role in the mythological interpretations of two great German scholars of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The most learned classical scholar of his time, Hermann Usener (1834-1905) turned to mythology on several occasions.[51] One of his memorable works deals with the myths of the Flood in Greece, in which he tried to show that this myth had developed from the image of the *Lichtgott* landing on the shore. The importance attached to light already shows how much Usener was still indebted to the nature paradigm and its antiquated solar mythology. Yet the fact that he looked for one underlying idea in the different myths of the Flood still strikes one as rather a modern thing to do and it does constitute a valuable insight into mythology.[52]

Towards the end of his life, in 1904, Usener also reflected about the relationship between myth and ritual. His starting point was a Delphic ritual in which a tent is destroyed in which the dragon Python supposedly lurked. The fact that the approach to the tent was called Doloneia and the month in which this ritual took place was called Ilaios led Usener to postulate that the myth of the capture of Troy (Ilion) originated from this ritual. This is obviously unconvincing, but his idea that ritual produced myth was also canvassed at the same time by English scholars (below) and has stood the test of time.[53] Finally, in the same year 1904 he also published a programmatic essay on mythology, which in one point is still highly relevant. Usener rightly argued that mythology is a full part of the history of Greek religion.[54] This is an important insight, as mythology is strangely absent from the leading twentieth-century handbooks of Greek religion by Nilsson and Walter Burkert. Anyone who thinks of Hesiod's *Theogony*, the myths about the gods in the *Homeric Hymns* or the many cult *aitia* in the mythographical handbooks can only be amazed by this absence.

At the end of the Great War the German philologist and archaeologist Carl Robert (1850-1922) published an impressively learned survey of Greek mythology, which was basically an update of Preller's long influential study (above). Robert's formative period was still very much influenced by Karl Otfried Müller, and, following the plan of Preller's handbook on Greek

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German and British scholarship', in J.N. Bremmer and A. Erskine (eds), *The Gods of Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, 2010) 483-503.

[51] For Usener see Bremmer, 'Hermann Usener, in W.W. Briggs and W.M. Calder III (eds), *Classical Scholarship. A Biographical Encyclopedia* (New York, 1990) 462-78; D. Ehlers (ed.), *Hermann Diels, Hermann Usener, Eduard Zeller: Briefwechsel*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1992); A. Wessels, *Ursprungszauber: zur Rezeption von Hermann Useners Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* **(**Berlin and New York, 2003) 7-95; R. Kany, 'Hermann Usener as Historian of Religion', *Arch. f. Religionsgesch.* 6 (2004) 159-76.

[52] H. Usener, *Die Sinthflutsagen* (Bonn, 1899).

[53] H. Usener, *Kleine Schriften* IV (Leipzig, 1913) 447-67.

[54] H. Usener, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1907) 37-65.

mythology, he therefore ordered the myths in a strictly geographical manner, starting with Thessaly and Northern Boeotia. He saw this area as rich in myths at a very early period of time. It is indeed the case that Pelion, for instance, looks like an extremely old centre of Greek mythology, as Achilles was raised here by Chiron and the Argonauts left here from Volos. However, Robert starts with a discussion of the Centaurs and the Lapiths, figures that hardly have attracted recent attention. He was not so much interested in their position between men and animals or in their social function as educators, as we would be today, but he focuses on their names, their origins and their adoption by other cities, such as Athens and Corinth. In this manner he surveys all landscapes of ancient Greece and discusses their main heroes and heroines in a strictly positivistic manner, which, much more than his predecessors, also made use of the archaeological evidence In a way, his impressive erudition could not be bettered, and for a long time his work was the end of a serious engagement with mythology in Germany.[55]

Myth and the British

In Great Britain interest focused less on the prehistory of Greece and more on classical Greece itself as the cradle of civilisation.[56] Increasing colonial expansion made the relationship between the white, 'civilised' race and the coloured 'savages', as they were called, more and more problematic; simultaneously, the Industrial Revolution had greatly enlarged the contrast between modern urban life and that of those dependent on the land and the Celtic periphery. Growing urbanisation made the interpretation of ancient myths through the nature paradigm attractive, and this fascination with nature even led the leading historian of religion at the time, Max Müller ((1882-1900), to allegorise nature to such an extent that he explained Achilles (and Siegfried) as a representation of the sun. This absurdity made one of his more positivistic critics, Lewis Richard Farnell (1856-1934), observe that mythology evidently was no more than 'highly figurative conversation about the weather'.[57]

As the interpretation of mythology through the nature paradigm imploded under the stresses of empirical work, notably in anthropology, all over Europe an interest in ritual came to prominence.[58] In Great Britain this manifested itself especially in the work of Jane Harrison, one

[55] C. Robert, *Die Griechische Heldensage*, 4 vols (Berlin, 1920-26). For Robert see O. Kern, *Hermann Diels und Carl Robert: Ein biographischer Versuch* (Leipzig, 1927).
[56] R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1980); F.M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven / London 1981).
[57] L.R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States I* (Oxford, 1896) 9.
[58] Bremmer, ''Religion', 'Ritual' and the Opposition 'Sacred vs. Profane': Notes Towards a Terminological 'Genealogy',' in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale. Festschrift für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998) 9-32 at 14-24.

of England's most original classicists at the turn of the nineteenth century.[59] Unlike many contemporaries, Harrison was very sensitive to new developments in German classics, French sociology and British anthropology. But unlike many later classicists, she also saw no problem in comparing Greek myths with those of the 'primitives'. Moreover, in contrast to most of her literary and philological colleagues, she was well trained in archaeology and always incorporated vases and sculptures in her analyses. It was in the preface to her 1890 study *Mythology & Monuments of Ancient Athens* that she first formulated her view on the relationship between myth and ritual: 'in the large majority of cases ritual practice misunderstood explains the elaboration of myth'. This was a completely new view at the time, as myth had dominated the scholars' agenda for most of the nineteenth century. But to whom do we owe this idea?

In the very first of the public lectures that were published in 1889 as his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites,* the extremely learned and imaginative William Robertson Smith (1846-94) had already noted that

> in most cases it is certain, that the myth is merely the explanation of a religious usage; and ordinarily it is such an explanation could not have risen till the original sense of the usage had more or less fallen into oblivion' (p. 19).

Even before that, in 1888, Paper 2 of the Cambridge Classical Tripos carried the title 'Mythology and Ritual' and asked 'How far is it possible to distinguish between the religious rituals of the Homeric poems, and those of historical Greece?'[60] Neither Harrison nor Smith was involved in the tripos, but the indefatigable author of *The Golden Bough*, James George Frazer (1854-1941) was. As he was also a close friend of Robertson Smith,[61] the final answer to the question of who first came up cannot be arrived at until we find more documents.[62] This is even more the case, as Harrison was also acquainted with the work of Karl Otfried Müller, who, as we saw, had already reflected on the relation between myth and ritual. In any case, Harrison's stress on the

[59] For Harrison (1850-1928) see most recently Bremmer, 'Gerardus van der Leeuw and Jane Ellen Harrison', in H.G. Kippenberg and B. Luchesi (eds), *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik* (Marburg, 1991) 237-41; R. Schlesier, *Kulte, Mythen und Gelehrte. Anthropologie der Antike seit 1800* (Frankfurt, 1994) 123-92 (the best study of her work); M. Demoor, 'Portret van de antropologe als een jonge vrouw: Jane Ellen Harrisons recensies voor The Athenaeum', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 112 (1999) 191-201; M. Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (Cambridge Mass., 2000); A. Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* (Oxford, 2002).

[60] Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison*, 125-7.

[61] R. Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer: his life and work* (Cambridge, 1987) 53-94; W. Johnstone (ed.), *William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield, 1995) 331-50. For Frazer, see most recently G.W. Stocking, *After Tylor* (Madison, 1995) 126-51; J.N. Bremmer, 'James George Frazer en The Golden Bough', *Hermeneus* 68 (1996) 212-21; F. Rosa, 'À Frazer ce qui est de Frazer', *Archives européennes de sociologie* 38 (1997) 301-10; G.W. Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology* (Madison, 2001) 147-61.

[62] It seems certain, though, that Smith had influenced Harrison, cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'Gerardus van der Leeuw and Jane Ellen Harrison', in H.G. Kippenberg and B. Luchesi (eds), *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik* (Marburg 1991) 237-41 at 238.

importance of ritual for Greek religion was shared by only a small group of British scholars, such as Gilbert Murray (1866-1956) and Frances Macdonald Cornford (1874-1943), who would soon be called the 'Cambridge School' or the 'Cambridge Ritualists'.[63]

Most of Harrison's views and ideas were already rejected by her contemporaries - and usually rightly so. Yet in one respect she would be an important forerunner for late twentieth-century scholars of Greek mythology. In her second big book, *Themis* (1912), with the telling subtitle *A Study in the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, Harrison introduced the idea that ancient initiation rites lay in the background of the mythical traditions about the Kouretes, young men connected with the birth of Zeus.[64] In other words, it was no longer nature or ritual misunderstood that offered the key to the understanding of mythology, but a social institution. However, Harrison's highly fertile idea had little effect on the wider classical world. Her book appeared just before the First World War, which was a watershed in her own activities, but also saw the rise of functionalism in anthropology, as personified by Bronislaw Malinowski,[65] and functionalism had little interest in mythology. Meanwhile, in Germany interest in mythology died with Usener and Robert, and the scholar who came to dominate the classical world was Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1848-1931), who loathed the idea of 'savages' in Greece, rejected the comparative approach, which indeed had over-extended itself, and had little interest in mythology. The replacement of myth by ritual had also been embraced by Martin P. Nilsson (1874-1967), a Swedish farmer's son, who had been strongly influenced by the books of Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880) on the peasant customs of Western Europe.[66] Mannhardt's investigations, which also included some Greek myths, had led to the widespread acceptance of agriculture as an important key to the interpretation of Greek religion, mythology included. Nilsson's erudition and longevity (an often neglected factor in the history of scholarship) canonised the agrarian interpretation of ritual, but also consolidated the long neglect of myth in

[63] W.M. Calder III (ed.), *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered* (Atlanta, 1991); F.J. Korom, 'Ritualistische Theorie', in R.W. Brednich (ed.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 11 (Berlin and New York, 2004) 724-31.

[64] J.E. Harrison, *Themis* (London, 1912) 1-29, although she had overlooked that the thought had already occurred to Usener, *Kleine Schriften* IV, 190 (1894[1]).

[65] On Malinowski (1884-1942) and his influence see most recently E. Gellner, *Language and solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski, and the Habsburg dilemma* (Cambridge, 1998); M.W. Young, *Malinowski: odyssey of an anthropologist, 1884-1920* (New Haven and London, 2004).

[66] W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1875-77), cf. T. Tybjerg, 'Wilhelm Mannhardt - A Pioneer in the Study of Rituals', in T. Ahlbäck (ed.), *The problem of Ritual* (Stockholm, 1993) 27-37; H. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton and Oxford, 2002) 81-7.

his authoritative handbook, which dominated the study of Greek religion in the middle of the twentieth century.[67]

Contemporary approaches to myth

This neglect lasted, broadly speaking, from the First World War until the middle of the 1960s. However, as often happens, a general neglect does not exclude the possibility of outsiders working against the grain of the times. This is also the case with mythology: in Germany two scholars tried to break away from the Wilamowitz type of *Altertumswissenschaft*: Walter F. Otto (1874-1958) and Karl Kerényi (1897-1973), who eventually applied Jung's idea of archetypes to Greek myth.[68] As their approaches have proved to be untenable and leading into *cul-de-sacs*, they need not bother us here, but that is different with another outsider.

One of the pupils of Durkheim was Louis Gernet (1882-1962), who spent much of his professional life in Algiers - literally and symbolically at the margin of the classical world. Gernet was highly interested in myth.[69] He not only pursued the transformations of mythical images into other fields, such as utopias and the novel; he also looked at Greek myth in an attempt to recover social values and institutions from the times before our literary documentation. As his thought is perhaps not always expressed as clearly as it might be and often results in a somewhat vague and impressionistic vocabulary, it is worth spelling out some examples.[70] When Polynices bribed Eriphyle with a necklace to persuade her husband Amphiaraos to join the military expedition against Thebes, Gernet wonders why this obliged the husband to go. In the end, he sees here the obliging force of the gift – as is hardly surprising,

[67] M.P. Nilsson, *Handbuch der griechischen Religion I* (Munich, 1944[1], 1967[3]). On Nilsson see A. Bierl and W.M. Calder III, 'Instinct against Proof. The Correspondence between Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Martin P. Nilsson on *Religionsgeschichte* (1920-1930)', *Eranos* 89 (1991) 73-99, reprinted in W.M. Calder III, *Further Letters of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff* (Hildesheim, 1994) 151-78.

[68] A. Stavru, 'Otto, Walter F.', in L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit, 2005[2]) 10.6932-35 (with excellent bibliography); F. Graf, 'Griechische und römische Mythologie bei Karl Kerényi', in R. Schlesier and R. Sanchino Martínez (eds), *Neuhumanismus und Anbthropologie des griechischen Mythos. Karl Kerényi im europäischen Kontext des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Locarno, 2006) 71-82.

[69] For Gernet see S.C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London, 1978) 76-106, 283-87 ('The work of Louis Gernet') and, on a much better documentary basis,; R. di Donato, *Per una antropologia storica del mondo antico* (Florence, 1990) 1-130 ('L'antropologia storica di Louis Gernet'). For Gernet's views we now have an important publication of notes on Greek myth, mainly written in the 1940s: L. Gernet, *Polyvalence des images. Testi e frammenti sulla leggenda greca*, ed. A. Soldani (Pisa, 2004). This 'new' book also shows Gernet's great indebtedness to Usener, which is still somewhat underestimated in Di Donato, *Per una antropologia*, 233-44 ('Usener n'habite plus ici'). On the other hand, Gernet is much more reticent regarding Jane Harrison, cf. Di Donato, *Per una antropologia*, 255-63.

[70] This aspect of Gernet is rightly stressed by Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks*, 89.

given that his fellow Durkheimian Marcel Mauss had written specifically on gift-giving (*Essai sur le don*, 1925).[71] Gernet had a special fascination for myths connected with divine kingship and accession to the throne, which he saw as deriving from a period that preceded Archaic Greece, surely under the influence of Frazer's *Golden Bough*.[72] Thus he could, rightly, see the Golden Fleece as a talisman with connotations of royalty, wealth and the sun,[73] although he could not yet suspect the connection with the Hittite *kurša*, a sheep- or goatskin hunting bag which served as an important cult object, as has become clearer in recent times.[74] He also turned several times to the myths connected with the youth of Theseus,[75] although this did not always result in publications;[76] these he saw as memories to a feudal time in which initiation played a central role. Yet Gernet was careful not to reduce the various mythical themes to a single scheme, and he distinguished the earlier parts of Theseus' career, which he saw as connected with rites of investiture, from the later parts in which he saw a case of tribal initiation. At the same time, he also noted that we cannot restore prehistory from Theseus' mythological exploits, as his traditions had been mediated by historical Athens and its *polis*-centred institutions.[77]

Gernet's most important pupil was Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914-2007),[78] who with Walter Burkert (b. 1931: below) dominated the world of Greek religion in the last decades of the twentieth century. These decades have also seen a great revival of interest in Greek mythology, although in retrospect we can now see that its main period lasted from 1965 till about 1980, when Burkert's interests started to shift to the Ancient Near East, and Vernant's fruitful cooperation with fellow Parisians Marcel Detienne and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1930-2006) disintegrated; as so often is the case with pop groups, their subsequent solo careers were less productive than their period of collaboration.[79] A second stream of publications, by their pupils

[71] L. Gernet, *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1968) 104-08 (1948[1]); Gernet, *Les Grecs sans miracle* (Paris, 1983) 262-66 (1936[1]).
[72] Cf. L. Gernet and A. Boulanger, *Le génie grec dans la religion* (Paris, 1932) 84 note 402.
[73] Gernet, *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique*, 119-23 and *Polyvalence des images*, 49-52, 123-55.
[74] J.N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2008) 310-17.
[75] For the older stages of this myth see C. Calame, *Thésée et l'imaginaire Athénien* (Lausanne, 1996[2]); C. Servadei, *La figura di Theseus nella ceramica attica* (Bologna, 2005); add now *POxy*. 68.4640.
[76] See the observations of Soldani in Gernet, *Polyvalence des images*, 88-90.
[77] Gernet, *Polyvalence des images*, 53-56, 102-22. Although Gernet had already connected Theseus with initiation in 1932, as appears from Gernet and Boulanger, *Le génie grec*, 78, the publication of H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes* (Lille, 1939) clearly was a great stimulus, even though Gernet's review was fairly critical, cf. Gernet, *Les Grecs sans miracle*, 201-11.
[78] On Vernant see Di Donato, *Per una antropologia*, 209-44; A. Laks, 'Les origines de Jean-Pierre Vernant', *Critique* 612 (1998) 268-82; A. Paradiso, 'Jean-Pierre Vernant', *Belfagor* 56 (2001) 287-306.
[79] Highlights of this period are: J.P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, 2 vols (Paris, 1965); W. Burkert, *Homo necans*, 1972[1] (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1983); M. Detienne, *Les jardins*

and younger colleagues, took place in the small decade of 1987-1994, [80] after which interest seems to have subsided somewhat. It is not so easy to objectively analyse a period in which oneself has grown up and of which one has been part. It is therefore with some hesitation that I would like to note the following selection as important results since the middle of the 1960s.

1. 'Myth' is a somewhat problematic term. The Greek word *mythos* basically started as meaning 'a speech-act indicating authority' but gradually evolved into 'imaginative tale' when Greek historians, philosophers and mythographers started to contest the stories about the past and/or about gods. In the fifth century BC, *mythos* could still have both positive and negative connotations, but eventually the balance shifted so that *mythoi* were presumed to be false unless proven otherwise.[81] As already seen, that is why Heyne introduced the new term *mythus*, not *mythos*, for the type of tales we nowadays usually call 'myth'. Yet it took a long time before the term was generally accepted: even Gernet still normally uses *légende*, 'legend', where most of us would say 'myth'. It is perhaps true that 'myth is not susceptible to a catch-all definition',[82] yet a definition as 'traditional tales relevant to society' takes us some considerable way, as long as we realise that 'traditional' includes 'looking traditional'. Even though Greek myths were created well into Late Antiquity, they were modelled on more traditional stories and thus could be recognised as 'myth'. At the same time, it is also true that 'myth' is not a clear-cut category, as it sometimes shades into what we would call a fairy-tale or a folk-tale, tales that in general are not relevant for society at large. In other words, 'myth' is a modern category and its main value is heuristic.[83]

2. Myth is part of a cultural tradition, but many Greek myths are relatively late, since only a few can be proved to go back to Indo-European times, such as the myth of the first horse Arion, the abduction of Helen, Prometheus' theft of fire, and the cattle-raiding Heracles. These myths focus on central concerns of society (horses, women, fire, cattle) on which depended their survival over several millennia.[84] Most Greek myths, by contrast, presuppose the political

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d'Adonis (Paris, 1972); P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir* (Paris, 1981).

[80] Cf. Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*; C. Calame (ed.), *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* (Geneva, 1988); L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore and London, 1990); K. Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (London, 1992); F. Graf, *Greek Mythology* (Baltimore and London, 1993); S. Saïd, *Approches de la mythologie grecque* (París, 1993, 2008[2]); R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece* (Cambridge, 1994).

[81] For the transition, see now the important study by R.L. Fowler, 'Thoughts on Myth and Religion in Early Greek Historiography', *Minerva* (published at Valladolid) 22 (2009) 21-39.

[82] Lightfoot, *Parthenius*, 231.

[83] For full discussions see Bremmer, 'What is a Greek Myth?', in Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, 1-9; Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 3-7.

[84] Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1999[2]) 18 (Arion), 57; P. Jackson, *The transformations of Helen: Indo-European myth and the roots of the Trojan cycle* (Dettelbach, 2006); M.L. West, *Indo-*

situation of Archaic and Classical Greece and are accordingly not very old. This is not surprising, as the public performance of myths determined their acceptability. In other words, myths had to be continuously adapted to new social and political circumstances: Basically, Greek mythology was an open-ended, ever changing system.

3. Myth is primarily a narrative that was told or sung in different communities or in front of varying audiences. This suggests that myth could cross national, social and cultural borders. And indeed, the studies of Walter Burkert and Martin West have shown that from the eighth century BC onwards Greece derived a number of myths and mythical themes from the Ancient Near East, the best known perhaps being the myth of Kronos and the Titans and the myth of the Flood.[85] This may seem pretty obvious. Yet the nineteenth century so closely connected myths with specific cultures that Usener still denied that Greece had taken over the motif of Deukalion's Flood from the Ancient Near East.[86]

4. Myth not only relates the deeds of mortals and immortals, but it also makes reference to animals and landscapes. All these elements of myth are 'good to think with'. This means that via myth the Greeks could explore the limits of mortality by pitting divinities against humans, such as Athena against Ariadne in a spinning contest,[87] or by relating the sad fate of king Salmoneus, who had transgressed the boundaries of mortality by trying to imitate Zeus and therefore was struck down by the latter's thunderbolt. Greek myths also illustrate the limits of acceptable matrimonial behaviour, such as the disastrous consequences of Helen's leaving of her husband for Paris or Heracles' bringing a concubine into his and Deianira's home with fatal consequences. Oedipus' myth well illustrates what happens when one kills one's father, and how a family is torn apart when sons starts to quarrel.

Myth operates in a somewhat different manner with animals, plants and landscapes. In myth, animals and plants often display symbolic traits that are ascribed to them by the Greeks, such as that wolves receive an equal share after a kill or are all alike, clearly reflections of Greek

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European Poetry and Myth (Oxford, 2007) 229-32 (Helen), 272-4 (Prometheus), 451 (Heracles).

[85] Burkert: *The Orientalizing Revolution* (Cambridge Mass. 1992); *Kleine Schriften II: Orientalia* (Göttingen 2003) and *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis* (Cambridge Mass., 2004). M.L. West: *The East Face of Helikon* (Oxford, 1997), to be read with the observations by K. Dowden, 'West on the East: Martin West's *East Face of Helicon* and its forerunners', *JHS* 121 (2001) 167-75 and N. Wasserman, *Scripta Classica Israelitica* 20 (2001) 261-7. See now also Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East*; A. Bernabé, *Dioses, héroes y orígenes del mundo* (Madrid, 2008).

[86] Usener, *Die Sinthflutsagen*, 244-48; see now Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture*, 101-16.

[87] Contests between mortals and immortals: I. Weiler, *Der Agon im Mythos* (Darmstadt, 1974) 37-128. Salmoneus: A. Mestuzini, 'Salmoneo', in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana IV* (Rome, 1988) 663-66; E. Simon, 'Salmoneus', in *LIMC* VII.1 (1994) 653-55.

practices and ideals.[88] Pines are linked with wildness and aggressive violence, and these traits clearly cannot be separated from their mountainous existence.[89] Mountains in myth can reflect reality so that we hear of herdsmen and hunters going to the mountains, but myths also 'refract, transforming the world by a process of selective emphasis and clarification and exaggeration'.[90] This means that the danger of the mountains can be stressed by locating monsters on mountains, such as the Sphinx or Centaurs. Or their wildness is 'clarified' by letting mortals and immortals, two incongruous categories in ancient Greece, make love on mountains, such as Anchises and Aphrodite in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. So, understandably, trees growing on mountains can be symbolic of that wildness.

5. Myth is not a repository of long-time history,[91] as recent investigations have demonstrated that oral tradition remembers events only for a short period of time.[92] This does not mean that myth stood outside history. On the contrary, myth is the product of a specific person, time and place, even though we often can no longer reconstruct the circumstances of its production, performance and transmission. Yet this does not mean that myth is the one-to-one reflection of a certain community. Myth can present an idealised image, but it can also falsify reality. For example, cities schemed to make themselves more important by 'hijacking' Hellenic myths: both Athens and Megara claimed that the sacrifice of Iphigeneia had taken place in their area instead of in Aulis and thus tried to secure the fame of the Trojan War for themselves.[93] Especially in Hellenistic and Roman times myths were invented and manipulated to construct kinship relations between two cities, and in late antiquity poets still travelled the ancient world to relate foundation myths and sing the praises of local heroes.[94]

6. Our final point concerns a much more fiercely debated issue: the relation between myth and ritual, two modes of symbolic expression that have often been related to one another. The historiography of this century-long debate is relatively clear and needs no longer occupy us

[88] A very stimulating study: R. Buxton, 'Wolves and Werewolves in Greek Thought', in Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, 60-79.
[89] A pioneer book on the symbolism of plants is M. Detienne, *Les jardins d'Adonis* (Paris, 1972).
[90] Buxton, *Imaginary Greece*, 87-88, who gives many nice examples of this process.
[91] For many interesting observations see Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 57-92.
[92] For Greece see R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition & Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1989).
[93] Cf. 'Bremmer, 'Sacrificing a Child in Ancient Greece: the case of Iphigeneia', in E. Noort and E.J.C. Tigchelaar (eds), *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Leiden, 2001) 21-43; for other such examples see F. Graf, 'Das Götterbildnis aus dem Taurerland', *Antike Welt* 10 (1979) 33-41; A. Lardinois, 'Greek Myths for Athenian Rituals', *GRBS* 33 (1992) 313-27; A. Pariente, 'Le monument argien des "Sept contra Thèbes"', in M. Piérart (ed.), *Polydipsion Argos* (Paris, 1992) 195-229.
[94] O. Curty, *Les parentés légendaires entre cités grecques* (Geneva, 1995); C.P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge Mass., 1999); Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 224-28.

in detail.[95] After the nineteenth century's love affair with myth the tide turned around 1900 when scholars started to claim the priority of ritual, which was indeed the ruling view of most of the twentieth century. It was one of the imaginative ideas of Walter Burkert to reverse the tide once again and to claim that myth and ritual arose at the same time, *pari passu*.[96] But is the suggestion helpful? Let us look at a strange Greek ritual that can help us to better see the problems at stake.

In 1970, Burkert published an innovative study of a ritual that was celebrated yearly on Lemnos and that clearly reflects a New Year festival.[97] On the level of ritual, every nine years the Lemnians extinguished their fires for a nine-day period.[98] During this period, they sacrificed to the chthonic gods, and women chewed garlic, which drove their men away. After the fire-less period, a ship from Delos brought new fire and thus helped to restore the normal social order. According to the corresponding myth, the Lemnian women had incurred the wrath of Aphrodite who penalised them with a foul smell. Understandably, their husbands consoled themselves with their Thracian slave-girls instead. In reaction, the women murdered their husbands except for the king, who was able to escape with the help of his daughter Hypsipyle. This celibate period lasted until the Argonauts landed on Lemnos on their return from capturing the Golden Fleece. They were much welcomed by the women in a rather licentious festival, and thus the normal sexual (and social!) order was once again restored.[99]

When we look at the myth and corresponding ritual, it is clear that Burkert has rightly stressed that the structure and mood of myth often corresponds with that of the belonging ritual.

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[95] See the surveys by H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion* II: *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden, 1993) 15-88; W. Burkert, 'Mythos and Ritual: im Wechselwind der Moderne', in H.F.J. Horstmannshoff *et al*. (eds), *Kykeon. Studies in honor of H. S. Versnel* (Leiden, 2002) 1-22; Bremmer, 'Myth and Ritual in Ancient Greece: Observations on a Difficult Relationship', in R. von Haehling (ed.), *Griechische Mythologie und Frühchristentum* (Darmstadt, 2005) 21-43, which I have freely used in my discussion of modern ideas; B. Kowalzig, *Singing for the Gods* (Oxford, 2007) 13-23.

[96] W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979) 56-58, who is followed by Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, 74-88. Neither Burkert's sociobiological explanation of the close relation between myth and ritual nor his interest in the theories of Vladimir Propp (ibidem, 14-18) are persuasive, cf. Bremmer, 'Myth and Ritual in Ancient Greece', 38-43; Kowalzig, *Singing for the Gods*, 19-21 (myth and ritual); Lightfoot, *Parthenius*, 237-40 (Propp) and Bremmer, 'Walter Burkert on Ancient Myth and Ritual: Some Personal Observations', in A. Bierl and W. Braungart (eds), *Gewalt und Opfer. Im Dialog mit Walter Burkert* (Berlin and New York, 2010) 71-86.

[97] W. Burkert, 'Iason, Hypsipyle and New Fire at Lemnos: A Study in Myth and Ritual', *CQ* 20 (1970) 1-16, reprinted with a few addenda in R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000) 227-49. For a very full new study see now V. Masciadri, *Eine Insel im Meer der Geschichten. Untersuchungen zu Mythos aus Lemnos* (Stuttgart, 2008) 164-258.

[98] Unfortunately, the manuscript reading of the Greek 'every nine years' is disputed, but see now B. Löschhorn, 'Weniger bekanntes aus Attika', in I. Hajnal (ed.), *Die altgriechischen Dialekte* (Innsbruck, 2007) 265-353 at 277-79 with important epigraphic evidence.

[99] For such licentious festivals see now Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture*, 261-5.

At the same time we should also note that the myth does not wholly reflect the plot of the ritual as Burkert suggests. It is rather striking, but the extinction and rekindling of fire, which seem to be among the most important acts of the ritual, are wholly absent from the myth. This shows that myth does not automatically reflect ritual. The myth, rather, concentrates on the role of the women. As such we can consider myth as an 'emic' or insider's commentary on the ritual. Apparently, for the Greeks this was the most important and intriguing part of the complex of concerns reflected in myth and ritual. The myth also seems to preserve an interesting sociological bit of history: the saving of the king's life. It seems that even in historical times myth could not easily relate the murder of a king without any repercussion – it may even be that behind this detail there are those ancient ideas about sacred kingship that were so dear to the hearts of Frazer and Gernet. Finally, it is clear that the myth strongly exaggerates: in the ritual the women keep their males at a distance by their foul smell, but in the myth they murder them. Myth, in other words, can exaggerate and picture as permanent what is only symbolic and temporary in ritual.

The myth of the Lemnian women was highly popular and occurs in all kinds of genres: epic, lyric, tragedy, comedy and even in Roman poetry. Each genre had its own rules, and this meant that the myth could be related in many different ways and always without any reference to the ritual. In fact, if we did not have the late antique notice about the ship we would never have known about an important part of the ancient ritual. Neither do we know anything about the performance of the myth during the ritual. This should make us beware of seeing in the interaction of myth and ritual *the* key to a better understanding of the relationship,[100] even if it is true that every new performance can introduce new accents and innovations both to the myth and, if to a lesser degree, to the ritual.

. The relation between myth and ritual becomes even more complicated when we do not try to relate a myth to a specific ritual, but to a more general existing ritual scenario. Quite a few myths or details in myth have been related to rites of initiation. Now when we realise the great importance of youthful choruses in archaic Greece, it seems reasonable to accept that the process of maturation was of great importance to Greek society at the stage that many myths must have been 'invented'.[101] This means that we reasonably can compare the snatching of Ganymede to become Zeus' wine-pourer with the snatching of boys in Cretan in initiation rituals, as wine

[100] *Contra* Kowalzig, *Singing for the Gods*.
[101] C. Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece* (Lanham, 1997); K. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden* (London and New York, 1989).

pouring was a set task of boys during their process of coming-of age.[102] Similarly, the feminisation of gods and heroes before they become adults or warriors, such as Achilles' stay among the daughters of king Lykomedes of Skyros before going to Troy or Dionysos' appearance as a girl before emerging as a powerful god in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* and Euripides' *Bacchae*,[103] can hardly be separated from rites of initiation - whether the Greeks once dressed up their initiands as girls or called them so. Yet these examples also demonstrate that we are already far removed from actual rites of transvestism in initiation and that once ritual acts have become literary motifs in non-ritual contexts. In the end the relationship between myth and ritual cannot be interpreted by a catch-all explanation. Every myth has to be looked at individually, and even then we often still look at a glass darkly. Greek mythology is not an easy subject.

[102] J.N. Bremmer, 'Adolescents, Symposium and Pederasty', in O. Murray (ed.), *Sympotica,* (Oxford, 1990) 135-48 at 141; Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 112-5.
[103] Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 118; J.N. Bremmer, 'Transvestite Dionysos', *The Bucknell Review* 43 (1999) 183-200.